

## **South Dakota's Voice in 2012 Farm Bill**

**By: Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin**

Earlier this week, I was pleased to host the House Committee on Agriculture in Sioux Falls for a field hearing on the drafting of the 2012 Farm Bill. I pushed to hold a field hearing in our state because I view my job in Congress as making sure that South Dakotans' voices are heard when it comes to crafting policy that affects our economy, our land and our everyday lives.

The hearing was a great opportunity for a bipartisan group of 12 Agriculture Committee members – 6 Democrats and 6 Republicans – to gather direct and early input from South Dakota producers. These members of Congress from around the country all emerged with a better understanding of agriculture in South Dakota – and that appreciation of our state's unique needs and circumstances will help me make the case for South Dakota's priorities as we write the 2012 Farm Bill.

The first panel included agricultural producers who raise crops including corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and livestock. The South Dakotans on this panel discussed concerns about potential reductions in crop insurance. Particularly for agricultural producers in parts of South Dakota who have experienced natural disasters, crop insurance is a critical part of the safety net. In fact, most producers wouldn't be able to stay in the business without it.

It's risky to start a farming business, but our country relies on the food, feed, fuel and fiber produced in states like ours. Providing farmers a back-up when natural disasters destroy the investment they've made in their farms is important to ensuring our country has consistent, reliable access to a safe and affordable food supply. I believe we made important improvements in the 2008 Farm Bill with respect to crop insurance. As we continue drafting the 2012 Farm Bill, I will advocate for maintaining this important and broadly utilized risk management tool.

We also discussed the implementation of the Average Crop Revenue Election program (ACRE). Witnesses stated that the program has much potential but, is too complicated. This, among other factors including programmatic changes throughout implementation, has meant that enrollment has not been as high as hoped. With this input, and the opportunity for the committee members to ask clarifying questions, we all return to the drafting table with a better understanding of the challenges we face, and potential modifications for improvement.

I was also pleased that on this panel of witnesses was a beginning farmer. As a member of the committee during the drafting of the 2008 Farm Bill, I helped author Beginning Farmer and Rancher provisions to encourage younger generations to enter farming. Again, as this program is new in the 2008 Farm Bill, it's particularly important to get feedback as we seek to make important changes in the next Farm Bill.

On the second panel, the focus shifted from production agriculture to biofuels. The Farm Bill plays an important role in incentivizing production of clean burning, domestic biofuels. It also supports research that seeks to utilize new and varying materials to generate energy through programs like the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). Supporting the production of biofuels, in addition to the establishment of infrastructure necessary to bring these fuels to

market, is critical to shifting our country away from depending on foreign sources of oil while building a new market that spurs economic development in our rural communities.

Finally, I was pleased that a representative of the forestry product industry could join us to discuss the impact of pine beetles on our federal forest land. Although many people do not associate forest management policy with the Farm Bill, there will be opportunities to improve the health of our forests through this legislation. Several members of the committee present at the hearing represented regions of the country with forests that have been devastated by pine beetles. I have joined with my colleague, Cynthia Lummis, a Republican from Wyoming, to request a comprehensive pine beetle mitigation plan from the USDA. Going forward, I will continue to work with my colleagues who are growing increasingly concerned about the impact of the pine beetle on the economic viability of rural communities and forest health.

These field hearings in Sioux Falls and elsewhere, however, only represent the beginning of the 2012 Farm Bill drafting process. For those who would like to submit written testimony to be included as part of the official Farm Bill field hearing record, you may do so through the House Agriculture Committee's website at [agriculture.house.gov](http://agriculture.house.gov). All testimony submitted before June 14 will be included in the Farm Bill field hearing record. In addition, I encourage South Dakotans to continue providing feedback, either by calling my office toll free at 888-371-8747, or visiting the Farm Bill section of my website at [herschandsandlin.house.gov](http://herschandsandlin.house.gov).